

Church of the Pilgrimage
Digital Service
March 15, 2020

Rev. Dr. Helen Nablo



Anthem

Lift thine Eyes

Kelley DePasqua, Barbara Northrop, Pat Harper – 2014

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/g4ogp58bqeovi31/AADRHtRirmt9bJWvaWSGYjcb?dl=0>

A Prayer Amid an Epidemic

By Kerry Weber

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth. Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us.

Kerry Weber *is an executive editor of America.*

Scripture

John 4:4-42 New International Version (NIV)

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

²⁷Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

³³Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

³⁴“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. ³⁸I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

Many Samaritans Believe

³⁹Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴²They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Sermon – Rev. Nablo

March 15, 2020

Third Sunday of Lent

The Church of the Pilgrimage

John 4:5-42

“Any One of Us”

As if March in New England wasn't hard enough.
This is a strange time in the church, to be cancelling worship
and not even being sure for how long.

And we have a new term: social distancing.
Some of us are social distancing by complete self-quarantine.
This makes sense for those who have compromised health,
for those who are at higher risk.
And, in keeping with recommendations,
we have cancelled worship and church activities for the next two weeks.
We will try to do our part to "flatten the curve" and we will pray that
everyone stays healthy and safe.

Social distancing brings with it necessary decisions.
By now we've all heard many times that the coronavirus
can travel a distance of six feet.
It is hard to social distance on a plane, or at a conference,
which is why so many things are being cancelled.
And you know, this is all hard for us.
There are numerous disappointments – trips cancelled, plays cancelled, sports
cancelled, our Time and Talent Auction Event cancelled.
Families are placed under stress with school cancellations....just a little too much
Togetherness to look forward to.
We are all affected in one way or another.

Our scripture lesson alludes to a different type of social distancing –
not for health reasons but for cultural and religious reasons.
Jews (and Jesus was a Jew) were brought up to believe that a good Jew would
distance themselves from others who were deemed to be impure.
Like people with illnesses or diseases.
Or women who were "on the loose", as in without a husband.
This is at play in our lesson today.
Jesus encounters a woman at the well, and rather than avoid her,
an unmarried woman, he engages in lengthy conversation with her.
Further, she was a Samaritan, and Jews had major theological differences from
Samaritans and generally went to great lengths to avoid them.



Take a moment to look at our image today – above -- the one that would have been on the bulletin cover.

It is so different from most depictions of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, for the focus seems to be less on Jesus and the woman and more on the disciples who are coming across this scene, this violation really of the norm --

that Jesus was even talking with her in the first place!

The piece makes me think: what are the disciples thinking?

Are they shocked?

They may not have said “why is he speaking with her?” but given the times, I am sure they thought it.

This man they are following keeps shaking things up.

Here he is, at it again!

“Oh,” one Bible study participant sighed before we read the passage out loud this past week. “I just love this story!”.

It’s funny...I have never really said that.

Maybe it’s the way it begins, with Jesus and the woman talking back and forth, he so metaphorical, she so literal

the miscommunication kind of brings me down, reminds me of how folks can talk past each other, almost like they are speaking two different languages – how there is so much of that today.

The quarrel between Jews and Samaritans about where best to worship God seems like arguments about how many angels on the head of a pin, putting the spotlight on doctrine that divides

rather than how to live a good and holy life.
Isn't God everywhere? Isn't it true there is no place we can go
that God cannot be with us?

But the story gets better.
And part of what makes it better is that for all that Jesus and the woman
don't get each other right away, they hang in there.
They keep talking with each other.
And there is tremendous honesty that takes place.
Jesus tells her what he knows of her life.
When he asks her to call her husband, she says "I have no husband".
He says, "You are right in saying that. For you have had five husbands,
and the one you have now is not your husband."
(here is where it is hard to just read a sermon and not hear it.
I imagine Jesus's voice being tender. He is not judging this woman, but
acknowledging the truth of her life.)

And Jesus really does honor this woman.
Women weren't seen as being capable of talking theology.
They didn't have a place in the temple -- rabbis were men
and they taught only men.
But Jesus talks theology with her, as he does with Mary
in the Mary and Martha story.
And then he does something else: he reveals himself to her.
He identifies himself as the Messiah, just as he did to Peter
and the disciples.
And we don't even know her name!

Now here I could go on about social distancing....how we do it
to those who we don't trust or understand.
We build walls of rock or wood or steel
or walls in our hearts, blocking others out.
I could mention how we want to help the homeless,
but are a little nervous about getting too close to them.
I could mention how we want to help those with addiction problems, but
might, if we are honest, prefer to see them at AA meetings
on Tuesday night rather than with us in worship on Sunday morning.

Do you feel I am being unfair?
Well, have you ever
placed a great distance between yourself and someone else
the way the disciples stand so far back from Jesus and the woman?
I would guess everyone would say yes to that - at one time or another.
We have our comfort zones, after all, and we don't much like them crossed.

But here's the thing.

Today the spotlight is *not on that*.
Not on the sin, but on the opportunity.
As someone in bible study said: "this woman, she could be any
one of us!"
Any one of us.

So what does that mean?
Just as Jesus met this woman, Jesus meets us where we are.
Jesus affirms us.
Celebrates us.
Wants healing and wholeness for us.
Offers living water to us all.

This woman becomes one of the first evangelists.
She goes forth and tells her story.
She tells everyone who will listen how Jesus looked her in the eye.
Told her he was the Messiah.
Told her everything she had ever done *and loved her anyway*.
As preacher Anna Carter Florence says, the Samaritan woman
"does not say the last four words, but they are implicit in her action,
and in the joy with which she runs."
(*Feasting on the Word, Year A, vol 2, p. 97*)
She is full of astonishment, amazement, gratitude, joy.
This man has saved her life.
He has loved her and set her free.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved and rescued me
I once was lost, but now am found
was blind but now I see.*

She could be any one of us.

May we know this grace offered to us.
By Jesus himself.

Amen.

Anthem

Psalm 42

Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.

Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God.

As the deer longs for running water, so longs my soul for you, O God.

<https://youtu.be/0yd5EE0hAB8>